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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a program designed to compare students' attitudes towards the use of traditional and alternative assessment practices. The targeted population consisted of a second and third grade general education class, a third grade physical education class, and an eighth grade applied technology class in three communities in northern Illinois. Each community is part of a suburban area where the family income ranges from low to upper levels. Evidence for the existence of a problem came from student surveys and teacher observations. Analysis of probable cause data shows that negative attitudes towards assessments have a direct effect on students' attitudes about learning. Students experience frustration due to the lack of choices they are given about being assessed; they experience anxiety because of the pressures to achieve, and they demonstrate low self-esteem as a result of low test scores. A review of solution strategies suggested by the professional literature, combined with an analysis of the problem settings, result in the opportunity for students to participate in both traditional and alternative assessments that will allow them to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding and reflect on their feelings towards the different assessments. Post intervention data indicate a discrepancy between the feelings of primary and middle school students towards the various assessments. Elementary school students tended to describe their feelings about traditional and alternative assessments using a similar vocabulary without a preference for either approach. In the middle grades, students preferred to engage in alternative assessments although they felt that traditional assessments were more reflective of their abilities. Seven appendixes contain cover letters, surveys, and consent forms used in the study and reflection sheets. (Contains 16 tables and 27 references.) (SLD)

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COMPARING STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE USE OF TRADITIONAL AND ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

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An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
 School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the
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Preliminary Abstract

This study describes a program designed to compare students' attitudes towards the use of traditional and alternative assessment practices. The targeted population consists of a second and a third grade general education class, a third grade physical education class, and an eighth grade applied technology class in three separate communities located in Northern Illinois. The three communities are each a part of suburban area, and the status of family income ranges from low to upper levels. Evidence for the existence of the problem includes student surveys and teacher observations.

Analysis of probable cause data reveals that negative attitudes toward assessments have a direct affect on students' attitudes toward learning. Students experience frustration due to the lack of choices they are given about being assessed; they experience anxiety due to the pressures they feel to achieve; and they demonstrate low self-esteem as a result of low test scores.

A review of solution strategies suggested by professional literature, combined with an analysis of the settings of the problem, resulted in: the opportunity for students to participate in both traditional and alternative assessments that will allow them to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding, and reflect on their feelings towards the different assessments.

Post intervention data indicated a discrepancy among primary and middle school students' feelings towards the various assessments.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

The students of the targeted second and third grade general education classes, third grade physical education class, and eighth grade applied technology classes, do not display positive attitudes towards being assessed. Evidence for the existence of the problem include student surveys and teacher observations.

Immediate Problem Context

This action research project takes place in two elementary schools in different districts and a middle school in a third district. Site A is an elementary school serving grades K-3 in District 1. Site B is an elementary school serving grades K-5 in District 2. Site C is a middle school serving grades 6-8 in District 3. The information in Tables 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 was derived from the 1999 School Report Cards.

Table 1 summarizes the ethnic background and total enrollment for the three schools. Site A has a high Hispanic population. Site B has the highest White population. Site C is the largest student population of the three schools.

Table 2 identifies areas of low-income needs and limited-English-proficient students. Site A has a high population of limited-English-proficient students and the

highest percentage of low-income students of the three schools.

Table 1

Racial/Ethnic Background and Total Enrollment

	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/Pacific Islander	Native American	Total Enrollment
Site A	29.0%	03.9%	59.5%	7.6%	0.0%	511
Site B	98.8%	00.0%	01.2%	0.0%	0.0%	253
Site C	92.0%	00.7%	01.7%	5.3%	0.3%	1,047
District 1	44.3%	03.8%	44.3%	7.4%	0.1%	2,129
District 2	98.3%	00.2%	00.8%	0.6%	0.0%	1,251
District 3	93.8%	00.5%	01.4%	4.3%	0.1%	3,473
State	62.0%	20.8%	13.9%	3.2%	0.2%	1,962,026

Table 2

Low-Income and Limited-English-Proficient Students

	Low- Income	Limited- English- Proficient
Site A	10.4%	32.9%
Site B	00.0%	00.0%
Site C	01.4%	00.2%
District 1	09.8%	15.6%
District 2	00.4%	00.1%
District 3	00.7%	01.2%
State	36.1%	06.4%

Table 3 summarizes patterns in attendance, student mobility, and chronic truancy.

None of the sites have a trend of chronic truancy. All three sites are above the state attendance records. However, Site A has a mobility rate of almost twice that of the state.

Table 4 and Table 5 show the characteristics of the teachers both by category and by professional levels. Males and females include all certified staff members. Support staff includes all administration, aides, office staff, janitorial staff, and school psychologists. Certified staff includes all classroom teachers, special education teachers,

and fine arts teachers. The average teaching experience in all three districts is approximately 14 years. There are just under 50% of the teachers in all three districts who have obtained masters degrees.

Table 3

Attendance, Mobility, and Chronic Truancy

	Attendance	Mobility	Chronic Truancy	Number of Chronic Truants
Site A	95.1%	31.9%	0.0%	0
Site B	96.4%	02.8%	0.0%	0
Site C	95.4%	04.5%	0.0%	0
District 1	94.6%	18.4%	0.2%	5
District 2	96.6%	03.5%	0.0%	0
District 3	96.0%	07.1%	0.0%	0
State	93.6%	18.1%	2.3%	43,332

Table 4

Teachers by Category

	Males	Females	Certified Staff	Support Staff	Total Number of Classroom Teachers
Site A	2	28	30	18	21
Site B	1	17	18	9	10
Site C	8	33	41	27	25

Site A is 69 years old. It is a three-story building containing 21 regular education classrooms, 7 special services rooms, and a gymnasium, which serves as both a gym and a lunchroom. There is a library equipped with 8 computers. Most classrooms have a telephone, television, one or two computers, and VCR. Site A is a K-3 building.

Site B is 49 years old with 10 classrooms. It has a gym, which serves as both a gym and a lunchroom. Site B also has a library with computers for student use. Each

Table 5

Teachers by Professional Characteristics

	Average Teaching Experience	Teachers with Bachelor's Degrees	Teachers with Master's & Above
District 1	13.6 Yrs.	51.60%	48.40%
District 2	12.9 Yrs.	50.60%	49.40%
District 3	14.7 Yrs.	36.70%	63.30%
State	15.0 Yrs.	53.10%	46.70%

classroom has a television. Most classrooms have two computers. Each classroom has two bathrooms. The art and music teachers come to the classroom to teach. Site B is a K-5 building.

Site C is 24 years old with 30 regular education classrooms and 4 special education classrooms. Site C has one gymnasium, a library, and a separate lunchroom. Each classroom has one or two computers, which are hooked up to the Internet, and a telephone. Site C is a middle school.

Site A curriculum consists of reading, spelling, writing, math, science, and social studies. Students are assessed through district assessments in each subject area. Special classes offered are art, music, physical education, and literacy. Lunch is not offered on a daily basis, but students who qualify may receive free lunch everyday. Hot lunch is also available for \$2.00 once a week. The following services are offered: speech, special education, reading recovery, a program named Helping One Student To Succeed (H.O.S.T.S.), which focuses of literacy, and small group reading instruction with teachers on special assignment. Site A offers chorus and Odyssey of the Mind, which is an after school program designed for problem solving, as extracurricular activities for third graders.

Site B curriculum consists of reading, spelling, writing, math, science, and social studies. Special classes offered to the students include art, music, physical education, computers, library, and math enrichment. An early enrichment program is provided for those students who qualify. Lunch is not offered daily, however students who pay may receive milk each day at school. The following services provided include speech, special education, and learning reinforcements with a resource teacher. Fourth and fifth graders may join band.

Site C curriculum consists of reading, math, science, and social studies. Students at site C are assessed through district assessments in the different subject areas. Special classes that are offered are applied technology, family and consumer science, art, music, band, and orchestra. A hot lunch program is provided daily. Site C also has many extracurricular activities for the middle school students. Cross-country, basketball, girls' volleyball, and track and field are offered. Sites A, B, and C are located in three different communities.

Surrounding Community

Site A is an elementary school located in a suburban area. The population consists of 17,767 people, of which, 74% are Caucasian, 19% are Hispanic, 6% are Asian/ Pacific Island, and 1% are African American. The median household income is \$36,649 and the Per Capita Income is \$15,024. The median home value is \$106,800. Total employment for Site A is 9902 people, of which, 35.5% are technical support, 21.1% are management/ administration, 20.3% are operator laborer, 14.7% are precision production, and 8.4% are service.

Site A is a large school district with 2,129 students, one superintendent, and five principals. The average administrator salary is \$89,103 and the average teacher salary is \$45,195. The Instructional Expenditure per Pupil is \$3,856 and the Operating Expenditure per Pupil is \$6,276. This school district is in financial difficulty due to the lack of funds. Programs have been cut in the past and the district has tried unsuccessfully to pass referendums in the last ten years.

Site B is an elementary school located in a suburban area. The population consists of 12,464 people, of which, 97% are Caucasian, 1.7% are Asian/ Pacific Island, 0.8% are Hispanic, 0.3% are American Indian, and 0.2% are African American. The median household income is \$93,821 and the Per Capita Income is \$44,253. The median home value is \$153,200. Total employment for Site B is 8984 people, of which 68% are management/ administration, 19.6% are sales, 6.7% are service, 2.9% are technical support, 1.7% are operator laborer, and 1.1% are precision production.

Site B is a large school district with 1,251 students, one superintendent, and six principals. The average administrator salary is \$76,832 and the average teacher salary is \$40,656. The Instructional Expenditure per Pupil is \$3,631 and the Operating Expenditure per Pupil is \$5,745. This school district is financially stable.

Site C is a middle school located in a suburban area. The population consists of 25,000 people, of which, 94% are Caucasian, 4.3% are Asian/ Pacific Island, 0.9% are Hispanic, and 0.8% are African American. The median household income is \$170,764 and the Per Capita Income is \$58,666. The median home value is \$284,300. Total employment for Site C is 10,209 people, of which 80% are management/ administration,

8% are technical support, 5% are service, 5% are precision production, and 2% are operator laborer.

Site C is a large school district with 3,473 students, one superintendent, and eight principals. The average administrator salary is \$92,991 and the average teacher salary is \$55,755. The Instructional Expenditure per Pupil is \$4,640 and the Operating Expenditure per Pupil is \$7,426.

National Context

According to Stallman and Pearson, "The appropriateness of using standardized, group administered achievement tests for children below third grade is highly dubious and questionable. The content of these tests is generally abstract, verbally mediated, and potentially biased against children unfamiliar or uncomfortable with test like activities, and with middle class manners and mores" (as cited in Meisels, 1995, paragraph 3). Some children have difficulty following test directions, or lack the vocabulary to be able to succeed on the tests.

Learning is a complex process. Learners are constantly questioning their understanding of the world they live in (Brooks & Brooks, 1999). Each student constructs his or her own meaning and validity of information that is presented (Brooks & Brooks, 1999). As educators, we can control what we teach, but we cannot control what students choose to learn. In Alberta, Canada, the government has placed so much emphasis on the provincial test results, that students and parents have reacted in negative ways by not showing up on test days, cheating, or voicing their opinions on their written tests (Wallace, 2000). Teachers feel that they are losing control of the curriculum and that the provincial tests are becoming the curriculum (Wallace, 2000). It is our

responsibility as teachers to find ways for students to find relevance in the curriculum that we teach (Brooks & Brooks, 1999). If teachers do not make this a priority, students will continue to lose interest in learning (Brooks & Brooks, 1999).

This is a national issue that has gained concern all three sites. The review of the literature in addition to teacher research will, it is hoped, shed some light on this timely issue.

CHARTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

There are many explanations as to why students may have a negative attitude towards assessment. The researchers surveyed 64 students in four different classrooms. Twelve students were surveyed in a second grade math class, 21 students were surveyed in a third grade math class, 20 students were surveyed in a third grade physical education class, and eleven students were surveyed in an eighth grade applied technology class. The survey contained four questions. The results are shown below.

Table 6

Question 1: Do You Think That What You Score On A Test Shows A Teacher What You Really Know As A Student?

	Grade 2- Math	Grade 3- Math	Grade 3- Physical Education	Grade 8- Applied Technology
Yes	9	16	18	2
No	3	5	2	8

In Table 6, students were asked to identify whether they felt that what they score on a test reflects what they know. In the second and third grade classes, over 70% of 53 students responded 'yes' that test scores reflect their level of understanding. In the seventh grade class however, 80% of students felt that test scores do not reflect their

knowledge. The reason for this may be that as students grow older, they tend to question the validity of tests and through experience, realize that there may be other ways to demonstrate their knowledge.

Table 7

Question 2: What is the Hardest Thing for You About Taking a Test?

	Grade 2- Math	Grade 3- Math	Grade 3- Physical Education	Grade 8- Applied Technology
Don't know the answer	0	2	5	1
Don't understand the question	3	1	2	0
Difficulty reading	2	4	2	0
Need more time	3	7	6	3
Too much pressure	4	7	5	6

In Table 7, results are shown as to what students feel is the hardest thing about taking a test. Overall, 30% of 64 students felt they needed more time to take a test and 35% of students felt that they had too much pressure on them to do well. The reason for these responses may be that students work at different paces, students are at different reading levels, or students may lack time management skills. Students also feel a great amount of pressure from their parents to do well, because parents set high expectations for their children. They may also feel pressure from their teacher, if it has been stressed to them that they must do well. Students also put a great amount of pressure on themselves to do as well as their peers.

Table 8

Question 3: How Important are Grades to You?

	Grade 2- Math	Grade 3- Math	Grade 3- Physical Education	Grade 8- Applied Technology
Very important	11	15	20	9
Not important	1	6	0	1

In Table 8, students were asked to identify the importance of grades.

Surprisingly, 87% of 64 students felt that grades were very important. The reason for this may be that society has placed an emphasis on doing well and receiving good grades.

Students know that in order to go to college they need to have the grades to be accepted.

Students need to have that external approval that their work is acceptable. Many students have not been given the opportunity to internalize and reflect on their own work. People have been trained to need reassurance.

Table 9

Question 4: What do You Think is the Best Way to Show Your Teacher What You Have Learned?

	Grade 2- Math	Grade 3- Math	Grade 3- Physical Education	Grade 8- Applied Technology
Take a test	5	5	2	3
Write an essay	2	1	2	1
Create a model	0	12	6	3
Perform	1	2	6	1
Draw a picture	4	1	4	2

Table 9 shows the results of how students feel they can best demonstrate their knowledge to their teachers. Thirty-three percent of 64 students surveyed felt that creating a model of some sort was the best representation of what they have learned. Children are concrete, visual-spatial learners. Similarly, in the third grade physical education class, several students responded that a performance of some type was the best way to demonstrate their knowledge. Young children need to remain active. Many are kinesthetic learners, and learn best through procedural memory. Procedural memory is stored in the body, or stored in one's physiology. This type of memory is exploited through experiential learning, what some might call the hands-on approach to learning.

Movement and other senses, olfactory and gustatory for example, trigger this memory system. A bonus of this memory system is that it is highly motivational (Jensen, 1997, p. 59). "Procedural memory is based on physiological states and is very natural for the brain to use" (p. 60). Perhaps this is why it is so easy to motivate students by using experiential learning techniques. Twenty-four percent of all students felt that taking a test was the best way to demonstrate their knowledge. Society values tests and the scores that are reported.

Probable Causes

History of learning and assessment

Prior to 1700, teachers used narratives to provide feedback. In 1780, Yale University started using the four-point scale to provide feedback to students on progress. This system evolved into the 4.0 scale used by colleges and universities today. In 1987, Mount Holyoke College began to use letter grades (Marzano, 2000, p. 11). Current grading systems may be ineffective because they allow teachers to include different non achievement factors when assigning grades, teachers weigh assessments differently, and letter grades assigned at term focus on overall achievement rather than the achievement of specific skills (Marzano, 2000, p. 13). Because grades have been used for so long, Americans place too much value on the message that they convey, and no longer challenge their meaning (Marzano, 2000). The literature suggests several underlying causes for poor student attitudes towards assessments.

Assessment Options

Traditional Assessments

Uses

In the past, teachers have relied on limited assessment tools, such as paper and pencil tests, that they had considered to be acceptable measures of students' knowledge (Costa & Kallick, 1992, p. 278). The use of standardized tests has a negative impact on districts because it forces them to focus on the end product rather than the process their students engage in (Perrone, 1991, p. 58). Teachers and students are faced with the challenge that there is much material that needs to be covered, and little class time to learn all that is needed to be successful (Blythe, 1998, p. 25). Therefore, teachers do not provide as many choices as needed because the process of making decisions about choices takes up too much class time (Kohn, 1993).

Negative Effects on Students

Traditionally, children have not been given the opportunity to make decisions regarding their learning or the assessment process. Decisions made by children are not valued as much as the teachers' decisions. Teachers feel that children need structure and limits for their behavior, if not for their learning (Kohn, 1993). In order to provide structure, teachers offer limited choices to their students. When children lack ownership over their learning, their attitude towards school becomes increasingly negative.

Traditional tests have taught students that the material that is important will be on a test; if it is not going to be on a test then students are less inclined to learn the material (Bigelow, 1999). This form of traditional testing has taken away the creative effort from the teacher to design a curriculum that is multicultural. As a result, students learn to not

value the curriculum unless it will show up on a test (Bigelow, 1999). Teachers can force students to complete work, but they cannot force students to care about their work. If students are not content with the subject matter or assignment, they will lose interest and their work may suffer as a result (Kohn, 1993).

An impractical method of testing is the use of multiple choice tests in which students learn to recognize the correct answers rather than problem solve the solutions (Shepard, Flexer, et al., 1994). The use of multiple choice tests has a negative impact on students because it focuses on low-level skills, superficial memorization, isolated evidence of achievement, and the acquisition of simple facts, therefore not presenting a challenge for students (Meisels, 1995). Students learn to focus on the product rather than the process of learning (Bol, Stephenson, O'Connell, & Nunnery, 1998).

Alternative Assessments

Uses.

The problem with alternative assessment is that it takes too long and it is too costly. In England, researchers found that it took, on average, 44 hours to administer and grade this type of testing to all students, which in turn cost the schools more money (Nuttall, 1992).

Negative Effects on Students.

As a result of cooperative learning, outcome-based learning, and alternative assessments, some feel that standards for achievement have been lowered (Sykes, 1995). Teachers are replacing their expectations for achievement, with a need to be fair, equitable, and increase the self-esteem of their students (Sykes, 1995). The focus is changing from teaching students to read, write, and to do math, to teaching students

through affective learning methods including the awareness of feelings, attitudes, and beliefs of students. According to Sykes (1995), this "dumbing down of America's students is a direct result of the dumbing down of the curriculum and the standards of American schools." In short, students are not being pushed to reach their potential (Sykes, 1995).

Pressures to Achieve

Factors that Influence

Students feel the need to please adults. They are depending on someone else to ensure them that their work is good or correct. They are unsure when they have done quality work that is at their potential (Kallick, 1992, p. 313). Girls especially, tend to feel more pressure to achieve and to prove themselves to their teachers because they often are given less attention in class because of their gender (American Association of University Women, 1992).

Effects on Students

According to Kohn, in a recent study, students who were told they would receive grades based on how well they learned the subject matter, had more difficulty understanding the meaning of the lesson, as opposed to the students that were told no grades would be given (Kohn, 1999). The more pressure a student feels externally to achieve, the greater the chance that the student will choose the least challenging task to complete to ensure their success (Kohn, 1999). When students are told to learn something for a test, they tend to view the material as a chore rather than being interested in the material as an opportunity to learn new things (Kohn, 1999).

Evaluation Process

Factors that Influence

As girls develop physically, they focus more on their bodies than their abilities to succeed. As a result their self-esteem decreases. Another factor that girls tend to face is that teachers tend to focus more on male students than their female students (Schwartz & Hanson, 1992). Parents' attitudes towards their daughters have a negative effect on their performance as a student (Blevins-Knabe & Musun-Miller, 1991). Teachers find it difficult to utilize information from student interviews because it is too subjective, biased in part by the student (Burke, 1999, p. 164).

Effects on Students

When a child experiences a difference between the internal and external evaluation, the child experiences feelings of low self esteem, self doubt, or resistance to learning. The student remains in conflict over their work and tension may arise between the learner and the desire to learn (Kallick, 1992, p. 314). Through the years, girls, for example, have been conditioned by their teacher's evaluations to believe that they are unsuccessful in math. Therefore, they have come to hold low expectations of their potential to achieve (Stipeck & Granlinski, 1991).

In summary, it appears as though the efforts of researchers, to accurately define competency through various assessment models, continue to be a debatable issue. Assessments, both traditional and alternative, are plagued with negative effects as mentioned above. Researchers continue to scrutinize assessment procedures, their uses, the bias that accompanies such methods, and the inability of assessments to motivate students to want to learn more. "If students graduate from our schools still dependent

upon others to tell them when they are adequate, good, or excellent, then we've missed the whole point of what education is about" (Costa & Kallick, 1992, p. 280).

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

Assessment Options

Alternative Assessments

Rationale

One of the major components of education has become the topic of assessment and how it is constantly evolving (Burke, 1999). Powerful assessment should show more than what students know and understand. It should show how new understandings evolve (Perrone, 1991, p. 58). Assessment should focus on knowledge, as well as applying skills and strategies appropriately (Burke, 1999). Students should not be filled with knowledge, rather create that knowledge as active meaning-makers (Kohn, 1999). While the goal of teachers is to help students meet and exceed standards, it is also the goal to develop true understanding in the process of becoming life-long learners (Burke, 1999).

Methods

Limits and structure are important in a child's life if the students have the opportunity to provide input in setting those limits. They need to take part in making the

decisions that directly affect them (Kohn, 1993). In order to involve students in making decisions about their evaluations, teachers need to expand their views of acceptable assessments that allow students a variety of opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge. Teachers often feel that the process of assessment takes away from instructional time, however, alternative assessment can be integrated into the everyday curriculum and be easily administered (Zhu, 1997). Such assessments may include the use of portfolios, observations, performance tasks, interviews, checklists, and anecdotal records (Costa & Kallick, 1992, p. 278). Portfolios are working collections of student work as he or she progresses educationally throughout the school year (National Association for Sport and Physical Education, 1995). A portfolio demonstrates the growth of the learner over time. Observations and anecdotal records are used by teachers to provide data about students for assessment purposes (National Association for Sport and Physical Education, 1995). A performance task is a real-life task given by the teacher to the students that is written in such a way that the students can achieve a number of answers to a given problem (National Association for Sport and Physical Education, 1995). An interview is used by a teacher to obtain insight about a student's thoughts, feelings, and goals (National Association for Sport and Physical Education, 1995). A checklist is used by the teacher to determine whether or not a student meets or does not meet certain criteria (National Association for Sport and Physical Education, 1995).

Effects on Students

The opportunity to make decisions is important because it teaches children to not only think about themselves, but the way their decision will impact everyone in the

classroom (Kohn, 1993). Children who are given choices and provided the opportunity to make decisions tend to score better on standardized tests (Kohn, 1993).

Taking Responsibility for Own Work

Rationale

A learner must make his/her own evaluation data in order to apply newly learned skills or knowledge to their daily life. The information must be made relevant by the learner. The learner must see the importance of the information (Kallick, 1992, p. 313). Students not only need to know how to perform, but when to perform and how to change their performance to fit a new situation (Burke, 1999, Appendix 14). We need to provide the opportunity for students to self reflect, produce positive and negative criticism of their work, and collaborate with others on their work. When self evaluating, the learner needs to internalize expectations for good work, understand how to improve their own performance, set personal expectations for quality work, and be able to verbalize strengths and weaknesses of their work (Kallick, 1992, p. 313).

Methods

One method suggested by Starnes and Paris (2000) is the use of the Foxfire approach. This process is an active learner centered approach to teaching and learning, where students work with teachers to develop the curriculum based on interests. It involves learners in making decisions about how they will learn, assess their work, and apply what they have learned (Starnes & Paris, 2000). When given choices that include boundaries, students of all ages will usually make good decisions (Starnes & Paris, 2000). Teachers need to stress cooperative learning rather than competitive learning (Bellanca & Fogarty, 1990). To motivate female students to take interest in subject matter, teachers

need to make the effort to call on all students when asking questions, and provide praise when appropriate (American Association of University Women, 1992).

Effects on Students

Students need to be taught to use higher order thinking skills by generating ideas, holding the information in their minds, and applying it to their life. By internalizing information, students learn to modify themselves as a learner (Costa & Kallick, 1992, p. 280). When students take an active role in planning the curriculum and assessing their own work, as with the Foxfire approach, they develop an emotional hold on their work (Starnes & Paris, 2000). In turn they strengthen their initiative, curiosity, and desires for learning (Starnes & Paris, 2000). By taking ownership, their commitment to meeting objectives increases along with sense of personal power and concern for group members (Starnes & Paris, 2000). Similarly, cooperative learning has a positive impact on female students because it motivates them to take part in classroom activities (Bono, 1991).

Student Involvement in the Evaluation Process

Rationale

Student interviews are a beneficial way for teachers to hear how students feel about their own work. The teacher has the opportunity to access the students' minds and the process they may have gone through in creating the product being evaluated (Kallick, 1992, p. 314-5). Interviews are beneficial because teachers can gather information about students' attitudes and feelings towards their work. It reinforces communications, helps to achieve new levels of understanding, facilitates self evaluation, helps to establish ownership over work and feeling of value, builds positive relationships in the classroom, helps children focus on the process, and leads students to become self directed learners

(Burke, 1999, p. 165). The purpose of evaluation is to learn how to improve oneself and develop goals to achieve change. In doing so, the learner is activating higher-order, metacognitive skills (Marzano, 2000, p. 102). The purpose for self-evaluation is for students to become critics of their own work (Perrone, 1991, p. 64).

Methods

Teachers need to motivate students to have higher expectations for themselves and offer alternative, positive explanations for their math performance (Stipeck & Granlinski, 1991). One factor of motivating students to learn is to bring them into the evaluation process. Students need to develop the capability to be successful and do quality work (Kallick, 1992, p. 314). To self evaluate, students need to self question, formulate judgments, incorporate criticism, explore other options, recognize their weaknesses, and work towards bettering themselves (Perrone, 1991, p. 64).

Another way to assess students is to use the reference to knowledge approach. In this approach, each student's grade is reflective of his or her progress and growth unlike being compared to the success of other students in the class (Marzano, 2000, p. 22).

Effects on Students

The most powerful aspect of achievement is giving children feedback. Feedback can increase the level of knowledge and understanding by 37 percentile points (Marzano, 2000, p. 23). Students were more successful and achieved higher levels when the feedback they received on assignments was in the form of comments rather than a numerical score (Kohn, 1999). Self-evaluation is another form of feedback that allows students to become independent, active learners with the ability to generate ideas and make thoughtful reflections (Perrone, 1991, p. 54). The ability to reflect is important

because it aides in the process of transfer. Self-reflecting makes learning more meaningful, purposeful, and personal. It also gives the brain a reason to pay attention, understand, and remember (Fogarty, 1998).

In summary, researchers have found that alternative assessments show how students think and how they progress. Students need to see how learning is relevant to their life and reflect its implications. Researchers believe students who self evaluate their own work, gain an understanding of their strengths and the areas that they need to improve upon. Through alternative assessment, students will have opportunities to make decisions and can benefit from the higher order thinking that is involved in the process. Most importantly, students have the opportunity to become independent, active learners through alternative assessment. Research supports that no one assessment tool alone can provide accurate insight into student achievement (Burke, 1999). An effective assessment must show validity, reliability, and objectivity (Zhu, 1997).

Project Objectives and Processes

As a result of the use of traditional and alternative assessment practices, during the period of November 2000 to January 2001, students of the targeted second and third grade general education classes, third grade physical education class, and eighth grade applied technology class, will describe their attitude towards the different assessments as measured by student reflections. In order to accomplish the project objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. Administering traditional tests.
2. Administering an alternative test.
3. Providing opportunity for student reflection.

Project Action Plan

The targeted classes for this action research project will be second and third grade general education classes, a third grade physical education class, and an eighth grade applied technology class. The teachers will collect data reflecting students' attitudes towards different assessment practices. The research period will be completed in the teachers' classrooms during the period November 2000 to January 2001. The purpose of this research is to compare students' attitudes towards traditional assessment practices and alternative assessment practices through the use of student reflections. The following is a detailed description of how the four researchers plan to meet the objectives stated above.

Researcher A, a second grade general education teacher focusing on the area of math, will use multiple choice tests, as the traditional assessment throughout all trials. As an alternative, students will complete a performance task, where they will create a model of the particular skill being assessed, as another opportunity to demonstrate knowledge and understanding.

Researcher B, a third grade general education teacher focusing on the area of math, will use multiple choice tests, as the traditional assessment throughout all trials. As an alternative, students will complete a performance task, where they will create a model of the particular skill being assessed, as another opportunity to demonstrate knowledge and understanding.

Researcher C, a third grade physical education teacher, will use skills based performance tests, assessing isolated skills, as the traditional assessment throughout all trials. As an alternative, students will perform an authentic task, assessing the use of each

skill in a game situation, as another opportunity to demonstrate knowledge and understanding.

Researcher D, an eighth grade applied technology teacher, will use multiple choice tests, as the traditional assessment throughout all trials. As an alternative, students will complete a performance task, where they will simulate an acquired skill, as another opportunity to demonstrate knowledge and understanding.

All four researchers will use the similar student reflections at the completion of each of the assessments administered. The reflections ask students to identify how the activity made them feel. (see Appendix E, F, and G)

Methods of Assessment

In order to examine the students' attitudes towards the different assessments, the researchers will analyze the reflections provided by the students after having completed each of the assessments.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this project was to use student reflections in order to have students describe their attitudes towards both alternative and traditional assessments. The researchers gave both alternative and traditional assessments during the period of November 2000 through January 2001. Students of the targeted second and third grade general education classes, third grade physical education class, and eighth grade applied technology class described their attitudes and feeling towards the different assessments by completing student reflection sheets.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to assess students' attitudes towards being assessed, the researchers administered both traditional and alternative assessments. Upon completion of the assessments, students were asked to complete a reflection. The reflection asked students to circle words that described their feelings and attitudes towards the different assessments. The results are shown in the following tables.

Table 10 shows the attitudes of 11 students towards being assessed in mathematics. The results of the alternative and traditional assessments were close.

Overall, the students found the traditional tests to be fun. This may be because the traditional chapter tests were found to be easy for the students. The students are in second grade and this type of testing is new to them. The students found the alternative tests more interesting.

Table 10

Students' Attitudes Towards Assessments: Researcher A/ Second Grade Math

	Alternative: Drawn Response	Traditional: Multiple Choice Test I	Alternative: Written Response I	Traditional: Multiple Choice Test II	Alternative: Written Response II	Traditional: Multiple Choice Test III
Interesting	1	1	3	1	3	2
Dull	0	0	1	1	1	2
Fun	4	3	3	6	6	6
Too hard	0	0	0	0	0	1
Too easy	5	4	4	4	5	3
Enjoyable	4	3	3	3	6	7
Frustrating	0	0	0	0	1	0
Challenging	2	1	1	2	2	3
Boring	0	2	1	1	0	1

Table 11

Students' Feelings as a Result of Being Assessed: Researcher A

	Alternative: Drawn Response	Traditional: Multiple Choice Test I	Alternative: Written Response I	Traditional: Multiple Choice Test II	Alternative: Written Response II	Traditional: Multiple Choice Test III
Happy Face	8	10	9	9	9	7
Straight Face	3	1	2	2	2	3
Sad Face	0	0	0	0	0	1

In Table 11, results are shown for how each assessment makes the students feel. Overall students felt that all tests gave them a happy feeling. Interestingly enough, only one student found that one traditional test made him or her feel sad.

Table 12

Students' Attitudes Towards Assessments: Researcher B/ Third Grade Math

	Alternative: Multiplication Game	Traditional: Timed Fact Tests	Alternative: Journals and Manipulatives	Traditional: Multiple Choice Test
Interesting	11	13	9	5
Dull	1	2	5	3
Fun	20	10	13	5
Too hard	0	8	6	12
Too easy	12	4	6	1
Helpful	16	17	15	9
Important	14	17	10	15
Super	14	12	13	5
Useful	13	15	14	11
Worthless	0	0	1	1
Boring	0	2	8	5
Useless	0	0	1	1

Table 12 shows the results of 20 students in a third grade math class. The results show a significant difference in opinion about the traditional and alternative assessments. Twice as many students felt that both alternative assessments were more fun than the traditional assessments. However, more students felt that the traditional assessments were more important. This may be a result of the pressure students feel to earn good grades. A majority of students felt that the multiplication games, timed tests, and journal/manipulative activities were all helpful to their learning, but less than half found the multiple choice tests to be helpful.

In Table 13, results are shown as to how students felt about their abilities after completing each assessment. It is interesting to note that students were more frustrated or felt like crying after taking the timed tests and the multiple-choice tests. The majority of students felt confident or good about their abilities after playing multiplication games or doing journal activities with the manipulatives.

Table 13

Students' Feelings as a Result of Being Assessed: Researcher B

	Alternative: Multiplication Games	Traditional: Timed Test	Alternative: Journals and Manipulatives	Traditional: Multiple Choice Tests
Confident	13	6	7	3
Good	6	2	7	4
Indifferent	1	3	6	5
Frustrating	0	4	0	7
Crying	0	5	0	1

Table 14

Students' Attitudes Towards Assessments: Researcher C/ Third Grade Physical Education

	Alternative: Game Situation	Traditional: Throwing and Catching Test
Interesting	12	13
Dull	0	0
Fun	20	21
Too hard	1	1
Too easy	3	4
Helpful	8	12
Important	5	12
Super	20	18
Useful	15	15
Worthless	0	0
Boring	0	0
Useless	0	0
Awesome	1	1
Cool	1	0
Fantastic	2	2

Table 14 shows the results of 22 students' attitudes towards being assessed in a third grade physical education class. The most interesting trend in this table is that there

was an equal amount of responses to all descriptive words for both the alternative and traditional assessment with the exception of helpful and important. Twice as many students felt that the traditional activities were more helpful and important than the alternative game situation. Students responded positively to both types of assessments. No students marked that neither activity was dull, worthless, boring, or useless.

Table 15

Students' Feelings as a Result of Being Assessed: Researcher C

	Alternative: Game Situation	Traditional: Catching and Throwing Test
Confident	17	12
Good	5	7
Indifferent	0	2
Frustrating	0	0
Crying	0	0

In Table 15, students responded to how the activities made them feel. One hundred percent of students found that the game situation made them feel good or confident about their ability to perform that skill. Ninety-one percent of students felt that the catching and throwing skills test made them feel good or confident about their skills ability, with 9% being indifferent.

For all questions shown in Table 16, eleven students in an eighth grade applied technology class were asked to circle one response. In question four, they were asked to circle two responses. The responses to question one were heavily weighted to the hands-on activities. Ninety percent of the students responded that they enjoy the hands-on activities. The students' attitude towards test taking, note taking, and workbook exercises

were noted in question two. The students made it clear that the traditional means of grading are not their favorite. In question three, the students feel that posttests are the most challenging, and according to question one it is the part that they would rather not do at all. Responses to question four seem to be typical of today's student. They appear to feel that posttests are the most important way for them to demonstrate what they know. Yet in question two the students answered with a resounding, "We don't like post-tests, note taking, and workbook exercises." Although they dislike these three types of testing, and it is the only way that students believe they can be graded.

Table 16

Students' Attitudes Towards Assessments: Researcher D/ Eighth Grade Applied Technology

	Traditional: Post-Test	Traditional: Note Taking	Alternative: Hand of Activities	Traditional: Workbook Exercise
What part of the modules do you like the most?	0	0	10	1
What part of the modules do you dislike the most?	4	5	0	2
What part of the modules do you feel is the most challenging?	5	2	1	3
What part of the modules do you feel shows the teacher what type of student you really are?	9	4	1	5

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the presentation and analysis of the data on students' attitudes towards traditional and alternative assessment, a discrepancy was found among primary and middle school responses. The primary children tended to describe their feelings towards both traditional and alternative assessments with similar vocabulary. They did not show

a preference towards either assessment approach. The teacher researchers feel that the reason for this response is that young children enjoy a variety of activities as long as they are actively engaged in what they are doing. Young children are genuinely excited about new experiences and are eager to receive approval from both teachers and peers (Pangrazi, 1998, p. 165).

In the middle grades, students surveyed prefer to engage in alternative assessments, however, they feel that traditional assessments are more reflective of their abilities. The teacher researchers feel that the reason for this is that middle school students begin to feel that parents, teachers, and even higher education institutions place much emphasis on grades and students begin to feel the pressure to achieve. They may begin to place their focus on their product rather than the process. Middle school students also found traditional assessments to be more challenging. The teacher researchers feel that students may find the traditional methods more challenging because they are not hands-on activities and do not focus of the process.

Recommendations for further study in the area of assessment would include a longer research period with a larger and more diverse population. This suggestion is made due to the fact that students excel in different disciplines and therefore their responses may reflect their attitude towards the subject that was used for research rather than reflecting their attitude towards the assessment. Another recommendation would be to provide choices to the students regarding assessment, and research which assessments students prefer to engage in. The drawback to this type of research would be the time that it takes for a teacher to create multiple assessments.

The ongoing debate over assessment continues to plague the educational world. Researchers will always be trying to validate that one assessment approach is better than the other. The question still remains- which assessment instrument best reflects student achievement? It was not the goal of the teacher researchers to establish which method was the best, but rather to explore students' attitudes toward the assessments they are asked to complete on a daily basis.

The different assessments used in this study, evoke different feelings and attitudes towards learning and assessment, account for the different learning styles, and provide feedback in different ways. It is the conclusion and recommendation of the teacher researchers that colleagues utilize a variety of assessment methods in their classroom instruction to ensure that all students are given the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge in a variety of ways.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A
Letter to Administrator

SAINT XAVIER UNIVERSITY

Field-Based Master's Program
Saint Xavier University and SkyLight
Field-Based Master's Program

To: School Administrators
From: Program Research Staff
Date: June, 2000

Candidates for the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership are required to identify a local educational issue and to design a project to address that issue, with a view to improving educational practice. The candidate listed below has designed an action research project and summarized that design in the attached preliminary abstract. You are encouraged to review this document and share any questions or comments you might have with the degree candidate. Members of the program staff are also available should you have further questions.

Please indicate, on the form provided, that you are aware and approve of the purpose and scope of the proposed project. The form may be returned to the candidate who will forward it to the university. Our best wishes for a successful school year, and we look forward to meeting you at the Research Exhibitions.

Sincerely,

Barbara Mulry
Instructor
Saint Xavier University

Esther Mosak
Executive Director, Off-Campus Programs,
School of Education
708-802-6214

Degree Candidate: _____

I have been made aware of the purpose and scope of the candidate's Action Research Project, and I approve of its implementation.

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Signature of School Official

Date

Appendix B
Parental Consent Form: Site A

November 1, 2000

INFORMATIONAL LETTER

Dear Parent(s):

As part of my work in class with students this year, I am participating in an assessment project to determine if different types of tests make a difference in a child's attitude towards school.

This work will entail providing your child with options such as keeping a journal of his/her work to demonstrate understanding of the subject matter, etc. The options will give your child choices as we work on various projects in my class. The choice will not effect your child's grade.

This project will benefit my long-term work with students as a teacher. Your child's participation in this project is voluntary. If, for any reason, you do not wish to have your child participate, please advise me either by telephone or a note sent to school by no later than Thursday, November 9.

I look forward to continuing to work with you and your child for the remainder of this school year.

If you have further questions about my assessment project, please call me.

Sincerely,

Teacher

Appendix C
Parental Consent Form: Sites B & C

Informed Consent for Participation in an Action Research Study
Comparing Students' Attitudes towards the Use of Traditional and Alternative Assessment Practices
Saint Xavier University
Field Based Masters Program
(708) 802-6215

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am currently working on an action research project in my classroom for St. Xavier University as a part of my master's study. The purpose of the research is to compare students' attitudes towards different assessment practices. The study includes the use of student surveys and reflections.

You and your child are not required to participate in this study. If you do choose to participate, your child's identity and any information that we collect from your child will be confidential. You and your child have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

I would greatly appreciate your permission to have your child participate in this project. If you grant written permission for your child to participate, we will seek verbal permission from your child as well.

If you have any questions about the study or your child's participation, feel free to contact me at school.

Sincerely,

Teacher _____

Please check one:

_____ I **give** permission for my child to participate in the study, *Comparing Students' Attitudes towards the Use of Traditional and Alternative Assessment Practices*.

_____ I **do not give** permission for my child to participate in the study, *Comparing Students' Attitudes towards the Use of Traditional and Alternative Assessment Practices*.

Child's Name _____ Child's Room Number _____

Child's Grade Level (Circle One): K 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Teacher's Name _____

Parent's Signature _____

Appendix D
Student Survey

STUDENT SURVEY
-TESTS-

Place and X by your choice

NO NAMES NECESSARY

- 1 Do you think that what you score on a test shows teachers what you really know as a student?

yes _____ no _____

- 2 What is the hardest thing for you about taking a test?

_____ I don't know how to answer the question.
_____ I don't understand the directions.
_____ I have trouble reading the words.
_____ I go too slow, I need more time.
_____ There is too much pressure on me to do well.

- 3 How important are grades to you?

very important _____ not important _____

- 4 What do you think is the best way to show your teacher what you have learned?

_____ Take a test
_____ Write an essay about what I have learned
_____ Create or build something for the teacher like a model
_____ Perform or act out what I have learned
_____ Draw a picture of what I have learned

Appendix E
Reflection: Grade Two

Math Survey

1. Circle the face that shows how you felt during this activity.



2. Circle the words that you feel describe this activity.

interesting

boring

too hard

frustrating

too easy

dull

fun

challenging

enjoyable

3. I felt _____
because _____
_____.

Appendix F
Reflection: Grade Three

Student reflections

Circle the words that describe how you feel
(mostly) about:

Interesting Too Easy Useful Others: _____
Dull Helpful Worthless _____
Fun Important Boring _____
Too hard Super Useless _____

Check (X) the face you wear when you play this activity.



Appendix G
Reflection: Grade Eight

ATTITUDE TOWARD LEARNING

- 1) What part of the modules do you like the most ? CIRCLE ONE
- A) Post Test
 - B) Note Taking
 - C) Hands on Activities
 - D) Workbook Exercises
- 2) What part of the modules do you dislike the most ? CIRCLE ONE
- A) Post Test
 - B) Note Taking
 - C) Hands on Activities
 - D) Workbook Exercises
- 3) What part of the modules do you feel is the most challenging ? CIRCLE ONE
- A) Post Test
 - B) Note Taking
 - C) Hands on Activities
 - D) Workbook Exercises
- 4) What part of the module do you feel shows the teacher what type of student you really are ? YOU MAY CIRCLE TWO
- A) Post Test
 - B) Note Taking
 - C) Hands on Activities
 - D) Workbook Exercises